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SUBJECT: OTHER RUSSIA'S BOUNCE FROM GOR OVERREACTION

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Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells: 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

¶1. (C) An adviser to ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, United Civil Front leader Garry Kasparov, and Yabloko Deputy Chairman Sergey Ivanenko told us in the wake of the March 3 Other Russia demonstration in St. Petersburg (reftel) that:

-- While reports of violence were overblown, St. Petersburg Governor Matviyenko's overreaction was the cause of the march's success;

-- Republican Party President Vladimir Ryzhkov's defection and the Yabloko party leadership's continued repudiation of Other Russia still leaves the opposition umbrella outside the liberal political mainstream;

-- Kasyanov's alliance with Kasparov and Other Russia is an uneasy one, despite unabating GOR resistance to his presidential ambitions.

-- Other Russia plans a mid-April march in Moscow, but lacks a coherent strategy to capitalize on its St. Petersburg success. End summary.

Suppression of March Backfires Painfully for Matviyenko

¶2. (C) Adviser to former Prime Minister Kasyanov, Oleg Buklemishev, told us March 5 that Other Russia was buoyed by the miscalculation of local authorities in violently breaking up its March 3 demonstration in St. Petersburg -- a mistake that he attributed personally to Governor Matviyenko. The Governor had crossed the political line in preventing the registration of Yabloko, despite its strong base of support. Her almost "irrational" hatred of local independent deputy Sergey Gulyaev, who has lead the charge against the city administration's championing of the controversial Gazprom City construction project, was another factor in the miscalculation. Thanks to Matviyenko's polarizing actions, he argued, the local Yabloko branch defied its party leadership's boycott of Other Russia, and local citizens were willing to vote with their feet on Nevskiy Prospekt against the Governor's "patently unfair" tactics.

¶3. (C) Buklemishev conceded that Kasyanov missed the most dramatic moments of the demonstration, having hopped into a waiting car after his speech to 500-1000 demonstrators, who were surrounded by militia. Only after Kasyanov's departure did the crowd, with Gulyaev and the National Bolsheviks in the lead, break through to Nevskiy Prospekt where, to the surprise of Other Russia organizers, several thousand more citizens were prepared to join in the demonstration.

¶4. (C) United Civil Front leader Garry Kasparov in a March 6

conversation said he was surprised by the turn of events in St. Petersburg. He had expected fewer than two thousand would attend the meeting, then disburse after a few remarks by the organizers. Kasparov joined Buklemishev in attributing the success of the march to miscalculations by Matviyenko, who twice on St. Petersburg television warned viewers not to attend the "extremist" event. Announcements in the city's subways had also provided unpaid advertising to the march, and the heavy-handed response of the militia had won the event unexpected international attention. Matviyenko's inept handling of the event, Kasparov guessed, had likely damaged her reputation among at least some in the Kremlin, who would have preferred that Other Russia's meeting had been peacefully contained, as it had been in Moscow.

15. (C) Kasparov called Gulyaev the march's locomotive. It was Gulyaev, he said, and who had led the demonstrators toward the police precinct headquarters where National Bolshevik Party leader and meeting participant Eduard Limonov had been taken after his arrest early in the event. (Kasparov later in the conversation alleged that Matviyenko had personally ordered Limonov released from detention, so that the city would not have to contend with further street action from young National Bolsheviks.) When police presence there had proved too strong, it was Gulyaev who had turned the march down Nevskiy Prospekt, where Other Russia participants were joined by St. Petersburgers out for a stroll.

16. (C) Contrary to media reports, "very few" demonstrators were beaten, said Kasparov, and he knew to date of only one about whom Other Russia was concerned, a spontaneous participant in his twenties named Nikolay Lipkin who had suffered a concussion and broken nose. Lipkin had been held in police precinct headquarters 27 for five hours without

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medical attention. Other Russia planned to attempt to press criminal charges against precinct police chief Yevgeniy Lyzhovskiy on Lipkin's behalf, Kasparov said.

Other Russia Still Outside the Mainstream

17. (C) Immediately prior to the demonstration, Republican Party President Vladimir Ryzhkov delivered a political blow to Other Russia, by withdrawing his support on the grounds that its collection of Stalinist and National Bolshevik fellow-travellers were unpalatable. Buklemishev argued that Ryzhkov's defection was politically irrelevant and derided the Republican Party leader and Yabloko's Yavlinskiy for continuing to try to find an accommodation with the authorities. Kasparov agreed with Buklemishev that Ryzhkov was simply feigning unhappiness with the state of affairs in Russia. "At the end of the day, he likes his soft chair in the Duma," Kasparov said, and Ryzhkov's unwillingness to cast his lot with Other Russia was part of his plan to remain part of the political establishment.

18. (C) Kasparov conceded that it was unlikely that Yabloko St. Petersburg's cooperation with Other Russia foretold a schism in the party. Yabloko leader Grigoriy Yavlinskiy remained in charge and unwilling to cooperate. Kasparov thought Yavlinskiy hoped to be tapped by the Kremlin as the "democratic" candidate for President in the event that Kasyanov's candidacy gained traction. When we spoke with Yabloko's Deputy Chairman, Ivanenko stepped carefully around the behavior of the party's St. Petersburg organization at Saturday's rally. He lightly criticized the decision to affiliate with Other Russia for the day, saying "our voters will not know what the line of the party is" if such joint efforts continued. Ivanenko questioned the wisdom of allying the party with Limonov's "radical left" party. In the same breath, he understood that members of his party were appalled at the electoral "farce" that was unfolding in St. Petersburg. Ivanenko thought Yabloko would be willing to work with Kasparov's United Civil Front, and he guessed that

one-half of Civil Front members were already members of his party. Ivanenko had no kind words for the St. Petersburg administration, whose "unprecedented cruelty" had marred the March 3 meeting.

¶9. (C) Ivanenko said that Yabloko Chairman Yavlinskiy's determination to eschew Other Russia would not be influenced by the Supreme Court's March 6 refusal to hear the party's appeal its exclusion from the March 11 St. Petersburg ballot. He found it "laughable" that the Court claimed to have no jurisdiction over the Central Election Commission's behavior. The only good news, Ivanenko said, was that the authorities' reaction to Yabloko's attempt to participate in the electoral process suggested that they viewed it as a threat to the powers-that-be.

Kasparov and Kasyanov: Uneasy Partners

¶10. (C) Tensions are apparent among Other Russia's more mainstream adherents. Kasparov described Kasyanov's early departure from the rally as a by-product of the fact that the ex-Prime Minister was unnerved by "events that he cannot control." He implied that Kasyanov may be hedging his bets as Other Russia's plan of action unfolds. Kasyanov, Kasparov said, "still behaves like a prime minister." He is reluctant to interact with the media because he cannot anticipate the questions they might ask. The core of Other Russia "is Limonov and me," Kasparov said. He described the "Other Russia" coalition as fragile, even in the wake of its unplanned success in St. Petersburg. Buklemishev confirmed to us that Kasyanov was equivocal about the umbrella opposition and believed that his decision to continue with Other Russia came at a cost, since his image as a centrist was tarnished among business community supporters who have little patience for the antics of Limonov and Anpilov.

¶11. (C) While Kasyanov may have doubts about Other Russia, Buklemishev confirmed that his participation still generated the most publicity for his presidential ambitions. The GOR's most effective tactic against Kasyanov was silence. The former Prime Minister generally received no air time on central television. The recent resurrection of corruption charges against a former GOR official, for which Kasyanov has been called to testify as a witness, was a departure from this tactic and was the first time "in several months" that Kasyanov's name appeared on television. Buklemishev attributed this latest campaign to the "liberal" camp within the Kremlin, specifically to the supporters of First Deputy Prime Minister Medvedev. Claiming multiple Kremlin sources for this information, Buklemishev said the most recent anti-Kasyanov effort, which was more public relations than

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hard ball tactics, was prompted by the fact that Kasyanov outshone Medvedev as a technocratic candidate: a better businessman, more experienced government official, and smoother English speaker, Kasyanov made the putative successor look immature by comparison.

Next Steps

¶12. (C) Kasparov said he had shelved earlier plans to set up an alternative ballot box in St. Petersburg, to which disaffected voters could take their ballots, in order to record their unhappiness with the conduct of the March 11 election. Voters instead were being urged to put a line through their ballots. Next on Other Russia's agenda was a mid-April rally in Moscow, with a simultaneous rally in St. Petersburg contemplated. Buklemishev did not know the degree to which Kasyanov would participate in upcoming Other Russia events.

Comment

¶13. (C) Kasyanov's early departure from an protest he thought had ended and Kasparov's surprise at the publicity generated by the march, in addition to his modest hopes for future such efforts, seem to confirm that the gathering's "success" was accidental. The St. Petersburg Administration's failure to adequately evaluate an event that, if left to run its course, would likely have drawn no more than a few thousand demonstrators and little media attention, provided a short-term boost to Other Russia's profile. However, Kasparov seems to have no clear plan for capitalizing on the publicity generated and for giving Other Russia the momentum it needs if it is to become a factor that the authorities cannot ignore as this political year proceeds.

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